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Translating reference letters in the light of skopos theory

The aim of this article is to discuss two thematic focal points using an empirical comparative analysis of Slovene and German application documents: cultural know-how as a translational communication concept (reception and production competence) and intercultural translation adaptation in the light of the skopos theory, which makes the target text the focus of research. In this context, the translator's task is to bridge the communicative gap between source and target cultures, whereby specific, culture-bound texts must be observed as a translation challenge. The cultural heterogeneity of international application documents is a particularly prominent feature. In this time of a free market economy, worldwide competition and a global labor market, the translator takes on not only the role of a constructive language mediator, but also that of a communication expert. Translation is defined as a communicative strategy interaction, which is determined by its purpose, the skopos (Vermeer 1983: 54). How the principle of sociocultural embedding of source and target texts is applied will be analyzed on the example of German and Slovene business reference letters, taking into consideration the historical and legal contexts. Notions like the international, i.e. Slovene-German, culture of job applications, as well as the closely related, culturally-specific principles of text composition are the priority of this article in the holistic translation study of application documents, based on an empirical research of 27 German and Slovene business reference letters in translation. These translations differ considerably from one another – not only in their composition, but also regarding their embeddedness in the legal system of the respective countries and the importance accorded them in the job application process. For a positive evaluation by a personnel manager in Germany, a reference letter must be rather detailed, while short reference letters are seen as rather negative. However, in Slovenia letters have to be as short and concise as



possible.

Key words: translation; skopos theory; reference letters; communication; cultural know-how.

1. Introduction

Functionalist translation theories, particularly the skopos theory, placed great importance on function, in the sense of the intended purpose of the translatum and on its cultural embeddedness. Therefore, their most important principles – the priority of the skopos, the translator as an intercultural expert, the importance of a clear translation task and, finally, the translation as cultural transfer – provide an adequate basis for the translation of convention-and-culture bound texts such as application documents. In his research, Prunč (2008: 33) goes a step further and introduces the notion of a skopos relation: “The skopos of a translation is to be understood as each basically arbitrary intertextual relation between the source text (ST) and target text (TT) which is to be realized (prospective) or is already realized (retrospective) by the translator. From now on, I want to refer to this relation as skopos relation.”¹ Each text is an individual language entity, as well as a cultural phenomenon, and the task of the translator is to build a constructive and skopos-oriented relation that is reflected in the target text. The target text has to function as a reference letter, because the function of the source text remains unchanged. In their role as mediators in transcultural communication, translators are simultaneously communicators and creators of new information because it is their creative power and activity that help create new social relationships, allow the observation of new phenomena from a critical perspective, create new communicative values and in that way a new translated intercultural reality, as well (cf. Reiß and Vermeer 1991; Nord 1991). As communicators, translators must also transfer and express their thoughts, attitudes and critical opinion. In order to construct translational communication discourse, the translator – as a mediator with an important social role – must have new information, knowledge and skills, especially concerning distinctive cultural features, norms, conventions, customs and traditions, but also in terms of the usage of contemporary information sources, e.g. electronic translation aids and parallel texts. According to Reiß and Vermeer (1991), the translational transfer of information helps gain new communicative

¹ „Unter Skopos einer Translation sei jeder von Translatoren zu realisierende (prospektiv) oder realisierte (retrospektiv), grundsätzlich arbiträre intertextuelle Bezug zwischen Ausgangstext (AT) und Zieltext (ZT) zu verstehen. Diesen Bezug möchte ich im Folgenden als Skoposrelation bezeichnen.”



insights into the target culture, which is of social use within a certain translation culture (cf. Prunč 2008) and influences the emancipation of people and their entire culturological and social habitus. The major humanistic, translational, anthropological and communicative criteria for defining a real communicator are concentrated on the affirmation of freedom of expression in all its creative forms.

Translating may be defined as transcultural acting, action being understood (as it “is”) as teleological (skopos-oriented, prospective) behaviour. Translation is never (as comparative linguistics might prefer to say) a transcoding of a source text into a target language. (Vermeer 2007: 26)

The main task for a translator is to understand the information i.e. the message of a written text and repeat it in another language, taking its function into consideration. Functional translation theory (Reiß and Vermeer 1991) considers translation to be a special kind of communicative action, which is culturally specific and can be considered equal to cultural transfer. The purpose of a reference letter, e.g., is the same in the translation as it is in the original. What needs to be transferred to the target language addressee is the original information from the source culture. When a job reference letter is to be translated into Slovene, the translator has to bear in mind that in Slovenia reference letters do not have the same value as in Germany and do not fulfill the same purpose; instead, the applicants have to have good qualifications. In Germany, however, reference letters are very important for a job application, and if you apply without a reference letter, you are basically eliminated from the start. In Slovenia, reference letters are unimportant, and no Slovene employer will ask the applicant to present one. Apart from that, the language used in German reference letters can be seen as a “code” in itself because potentially negative qualities of the applicants are transferred in a “coded” way, using certain expressions. Therefore, Reiß/Vermeer present the opinion that a translation can be carried out only “when this seems appropriate for the translator (i.e. through the translator for someone ‘that comes into question’) according to the context of the target culture (and language)” (Reiß/Vermeer 1991: 84).² In the following, I want to show how serious are the differences in the structure of specialized texts (reference letters), and how this can reflect on the translation.

Reiß and Vermeer (1991: 96) conclude: “Die Dominante aller Translation ist deren Zweck”, i.e., texts are always created for a certain purpose, and translation is therefore always purpose-built. The relevant scholarly literature therefore emphasizes, with good reason, that translation is not only a linguistic, but always a

² Original: “wenn dies nach den Umständen der Zielkultur (und – sprache) für den Translator (bzw. durch ihn für jemanden, ‘der infrage kommt’) angebracht erscheint.”



cultural transfer as well (cf. Reiß and Vermeer 1991: 4). For the translator, this means that he/she must be acquainted with both the source and the target cultures because linguistic activity is almost always cultural activity as well (cf. Hönig and Kußmaul 2003: 58; Snell-Hornby 1995: 13; Stolze 2001:178; Vermeer 1994: 52). In recent decades, translation studies have seen the replacement of a language-centered concept of translation by a culture-centered understanding, which has led to new concepts by which translation is seen as both social practice and interactive transfer. At the same time, two structural levels define the translation process: the social and the cultural levels. Cultural differences make the development of an empathic understanding of other cultures difficult. Not only language, script, history, religion, customs, traditions, conventions and norms, but also subjective attitudes can be disturbing factors (cf. Heringer 2008; Hinnenkamp 1994; Maletzke 1999).

What leads to division here are the different views of interpersonal relationships – between man and woman, people and religion – and differences in the understanding of life and death or the meaning of life, as well as in the scale of values, professional practice and communication culture. All of this constrains translators in terms of their own belonging to a certain cultural circle, so that there are various obstacles within transcultural communication that are reflected in anxiety or uncertainty, ethnocentrism, stereotypes, as well as in nonverbal interpretation and language. Translation undoubtedly requires adequate linguistic knowledge, the basic requirement but cultural knowledge is no less important. At this point, problems usually occur: a text must be translated, which turns out to be difficult because it contains words and notions that have no equivalent in the target language. The problem is especially prominent with “small languages”, e.g. Slovene, which has a relatively small number of speakers in the EU. The realization that culture and ideology in the broader sense of the word play an important role within translation processes is not new. Culture-bound translation approaches can be found in Nida: “Languages are basically a part of culture, and words cannot be understood correctly apart from the local cultural phenomena for which they are symbols” (Nida 1945: 207). Koller also emphasizes the aspect of culture in translation: “Übersetzung ist - in einem weiteren Sinne – immer *Kulturarbeit*, in einem engeren Sinne *Spracharbeit*: Arbeit mit der anderen und an der eigenen Kultur, Arbeit mit und an der eigenen Sprache. {...} Die Übersetzungsaufgabe ist eine *kommunikative Herausforderung*, die unter zwei Aspekten gesehen werden muss: dem Aspekt des Kulturkontakts und dem Aspekt des Sprachkontakts” (Koller 2001: 59). While Nida differentiates between two



types of equivalence in translation – formally equivalent³ and dynamically equivalent translations – Koller's notion of equivalence is characterized by three features: translation relationship, reference frame and translation units. His notion of equivalence is determined by the text worlds, i.e., the cultures of the source and target languages in a bipolar and communicative way. "In unserem Zusammenhang ist Äquivalenz in der Differenz – oder eher: Äquivalenz trotz Differenz – das Grundproblem und die praktische Herausforderung der Übersetzung" (Koller 2001:130). What can cause problems are special text parts, sections from the entirety of the text which have no equivalent in the target language in neither word, notion nor meaning. Text production as well as text reception always depends on the cultural background of a communication community, and the task of the translator is to bridge this communicative gap (Koller 2001: 60). Vermeer (2007: 29) rightly claims the following: "Translational acting can be defined as a skopos-oriented transcultural text production under given and clearly specifiable (and specified) circumstances. These cultural-specific circumstances predetermine to a great extent the text to be produced."

2. Convention-bound text types in the context of translation cultures

According to Prunč (2008), translation is a professional activity in a certain translation culture. Translation culture can be defined as a self-referential and self-regulating subsystem of a culture which relates to the action field of translation and has historically developed from the dialectic relationship between translation practice and its social environment. The social construct of translation culture is configured by a set of socially controlled and controllable translation-relevant norms, conventions, expectations, values and habitualized patterns of behavior concerning all action partners, as well as the agents and agencies that actually or potentially participate in translation processes of the respective cultures. The notion of translation culture includes a specific segment of the communication culture of a certain cultural circle, which involves private and public communication. It is in itself characterized by conventions, rules and norms, which set boundaries to the basic arbitrariness of the skopos and with which a professional translator must be familiar in order to perform his/her activities with professional competence.

³ Formally equivalent translation refers to and orients itself towards the target language, dynamically equivalent translation to the target culture and the recipient.



According to Prunč, translation culture consists of receptive and productive elements that considerably influence the translation technique and the work culture of the translator within relevant cultural circles. When you observe the translation process, i.e. the production of a translation in the light of the skopos and communication strategy, you can see that there are different translation work cultures referring to linguistic and visual forms of translation. The communication and translation processes are characterized by a certain tension between the communication cultures which try to strategically influence the recipient of the translated message in order to explore its position of power. According to Stolze (2001) the task of the translator is to understand the message of a written text, taking into consideration its function in another language, whereby the translator makes all the decisions on the appropriateness of translation on his/her own, and applies adequate norms and strategies. Translation is not only a linguistic activity, but also considerably and primarily a culture-transferring activity. This is especially visible in translations of texts such as school reports and reference letters, recipes, instruction manuals, menus and obituaries, in which the writing conventions of certain text types differ considerably between the source and target languages. When translating such texts, one must take into account target language conventions; in so doing, the text function has priority because the translated text has to function as part of the target culture in target language situations. Large language cultures such as the Germanic, Romance, Russian or Chinese try to reflect a part of their ideological power in their translations, as well (cf. Vreg 1998). Transcultural communication displays complexity, diversity and readiness for conflict in communicative interaction, so that the translator, as an intercultural mediator, is assigned a special communicative role here. "Translators and interpreters have probably always been aware of the existence of cultural differences. The boundaries between cultures cannot, however, be drawn without any problems..." (Skog-Södersved 2005: 70). In practice, we are, unfortunately, often confronted with the problem of bad translations, which can be traced back to the lack of translation competence or professional overload as a consequence of insufficient professional qualifications of translators, i.e. to deficits such as insufficient specialized competence, inadequate professional education, cheap offers of translation services and abrupt deadlines for the delivery of translations.

All this leads to a decline in professional prestige and a blurring of the distinction between professional and amateur translators. According to Kučiš (2011) in a multicultural society, the conventions for composing a certain type of text turn out to be a translation problem; nevertheless, the translator has certain skills that help him/her successfully achieve transcultural communication.



Correlation problems, i.e. equivalence status between source and target cultures, and, at the same time, the often deficient translational competence of the translator, play important roles here. The translation process is complex and characterized by different phases, but no matter how wide or narrow this process may be, the analysis of the source language text and the definition of the target language text type must not be bypassed. With regard to the source language text, the translator determines the features of a certain text type using his/her translation competence (reception and production competence) and, in doing so, detects the text type to which it belongs and the function it performs (cf. Kučiš 2009). The same strategically professional competence is applied when a text is translated into the target language. The translator has to decide which text type is to be used in the target language and which specific culturemes (cf. e.g. Oksaar 1988; Chesterman 2000) are typical of the text type in question. These culturemes are then used in the translated text in such a way that the reader has a new chance of correctly identifying the text. The interpretation and translation of convention-bound, text type specific texts, such as job reference letters, require not only an excellent knowledge of the languages in which the texts are written, but also familiarity with the material, social and spiritual culture in which they were created. When translating, it can happen that the aforementioned translational competence of the translator is not always enough for the production of an equivalent text. In such cases, it is advisable to bolster linguistic, extralinguistic and professional competence by using certain aids, in cases where bilingual dictionaries and similar reference texts are rarely of any help. The translator is compelled to use parallel texts to identify the features of specific text types and transfer them adequately. Such text types are characterized by text organization signals, such as introductory phrases, fixed text blocks, endings and standard expressions. Translation is to be understood as target language text production. The text type usually remains the same in the source and target languages because the text function does not change in specialized translations.

3. Historical and legal framework

In Germany, a reference letter is one of the most important certificates people receive in the course of their lives because it is needed to apply for a new job. One can apply for a job without any reference letters from previous employers, but this may raise suspicion that one wants to conceal something negative. Therefore in Germany, the complete documentation of one's professional career is necessary to apply successfully for a new job. This is why one has to pay special attention to the



content of each reference letter received in the course of one's professional life.

In contrast, the Slovene Labor Contract Law requires adequate educational qualification, but no reference letters. Reference letters can be found in practice, especially when one applies for a job abroad, e.g., in Germany. However, these are somewhat smaller in volume. The challenge of translating job application documents places special emphasis on the metalinguistic and conative language functions of Jakobson's communication model. Precisely because the language and culture contacts between German and Slovene have a long and intensive history, the size and importance of cultural differences are somewhat underestimated. The situational character of texts and translata is characterized not only by the way we express something, but also by what we communicate and what not. German business reference letters usually report on the achievements, professional competencies and work quality of the applicant, while Slovene application papers have to be as short and concise as possible in order to receive a positive assessment. The translator is thus faced with a dilemma: how should one translate the elliptical application papers from the source language into German? and vice versa: which translation strategy should be used for the many-layered German texts, which are additionally complicated by a secret code, in order to achieve the right communicative function for the Slovene reader? Notions such as "Slovene-German reference letters" and the closely related culturally-specific principles of text composition and interactive communicative translation strategies have to be taken into consideration in holistic translation studies research into reference letters.

The tradition of German job reference letters can be traced back to the time of the Kingdom of Prussia, when the "Gesindedienstbuch" ("service book") was introduced in 1846: "Upon dismissal of servants, the masters should write a complete testimony of the conduct and behavior in the service book."⁴ This Servants' Law remained valid until the introduction of the German Civil Code in 1900, which guaranteed the legal right to a reference letter for all employees, i.e. factory workers, sales persons, maids. The contemporary German legislation (§109 of the Trade Regulation Act – GewO, 2003) is strict and creates a basis for the content of reference letters of all employees. The Federal Ministry of Justice prescribes:

⁴ "Bei Entlassung des Gesindes ist von der Dienstherrschaft ein vollständiges Zeugnis über die Führung und das Benehmen in das Gesindebuch einzutragen."



1. *Der Arbeitnehmer hat bei Beendigung eines Arbeitsverhältnisses Anspruch auf ein schriftliches Zeugnis. Das Zeugnis muss mindestens Angaben zu Art und Dauer der Tätigkeit (einfaches Zeugnis) enthalten. Der Arbeitnehmer kann verlangen, dass sich die Angaben darüber hinaus auf Leistung und Verhalten im Arbeitsverhältnis (qualifiziertes Zeugnis) erstrecken.*
2. *Das Zeugnis muss klar und verständlich formuliert sein. Es darf keine Merkmale oder Formulierungen enthalten, die den Zweck haben, eine andere als aus der äußeren Form oder aus dem Wortlaut ersichtliche Aussage über den Arbeitnehmer zu treffen.*
3. *Die Erteilung des Zeugnisses in elektronischer Form ist ausgeschlossen.*

The German employer is obliged to issue a true and favorable reference letter (Decision of the Federal Court of Justice from 21.6.2005, 9 AZR 352/04). These regulations entail considerable potential for conflict potential because an employer does not want to write a good reference letter for an employee with whom he/she was not satisfied. Over time, “reference letter language” and “secret code” was developed, in which “positive” formulations actually have a pejorative meaning.

Although Slovenia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the 19th century (1867–1918) and therefore had intensive contact with the German-speaking area and its legislation, the common practice, i.e. the writing of reference letters, did not prevail there. In the valid and revised Slovene Labor Contract Law (*Zakon o delovnih razmerjih*, Ur. list RS, 42/2002), the area of reference letters is not paragraphically established, because paragraphs 26 and 27 of this law, which define the rights and obligations of employees, only determine that “*the employer is allowed to require only those application documents from the candidate (employee) which prove that he/she has the necessary education and is therefore qualified for the job position.*” Everything that goes beyond that is seen as unimportant for employment, i.e. application, or even discriminatory, according to Slovene Labor Law. Still, the wording of the law stipulates that “*the employer is allowed to verify the professional knowledge and abilities of the candidate (employee) before the conclusion of the labor contract...*”.

In Slovenia, a business reference letter can be issued upon the employee’s request when an employment contract is being terminated, but the employer is not obliged to comply, and this eventually always depends on his/her good will. The fact that Slovenia has to this day no legal regulation of reference letters and testimonials is historically determined, since it was part of the socialist Republic of Yugoslavia from 1945 to 1991, where the economic and political systems reduced



the fluctuation of workpeople and employees, i.e. “workers”, to a minimum and where party political services and references were primarily taken into consideration. The second reason is macroeconomic and geographic in nature because Slovenia is a small country with approx. 2m people. Of these, 836,081 employees were recorded in the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia in January 2010, a figure which helps to clarify the concentration of the economic and job-seeking potential. In Germany, employees therefore have the right to a job reference letter, while this is not legally prescribed in Slovenia but can be provided at the request of the employee.

4. Methodology and empirical analysis

In our study of Slovene and German job reference letters, we analyzed 12 authentic German and 15 Slovene reference letters, whereby we came to the conclusion that there are not only legal, but also practical differences between Slovene and German reference letters, as shown in the following table (Table 1). In each country, certain conventions have developed in writing reference letters, the formulation of which can be looked up in advice booklets. The composition of an authorized German reference letter usually includes six paragraphs (cf. Duden, 2008 and 2010), while Slovene reference letters, i.e. letters of recommendation, are limited to three paragraphs (Table 1). The analyzed composition of German and Slovene reference letters is a result of a theoretical and empirical research. Duden’s theory was substantiated by the research of our corpus.

Table 1. Composition of German and Slovene reference letters.

German job reference letter	Slovene business reference letter
<i>many-layered, detailed, coded</i>	<i>short, concise, unambiguous –non-coded</i>
1. Introduction 2. Professional development 3. Job description 4. Performance evaluation 5. Personal conduct 6. Closing	1. Personal information 2. Function in the company 3. Reason for dismissal

In German reference letters, transparent, non-coded formulations and adjective gradations are used for performance and accomplishment descriptions, and these are based on school grades (*sehr gut, gut, befriedigend/zufriedenstellend, ausreichend*); this scale is not obligatory. The employer can choose among synonyms



such as *vortrefflich*, *vorzüglich*, *vorbildlich*, *hervorragend*, *außerordentlich*, *beispielhaft*. These standard formulations can be qualified by complementary expressions, such as *immer*, *jederzeit*, *meistens*, *in der Regel*, *häufig*, *sehr*, *besonders*, *stets*, *fast immer*, *gleichmäßig*. Some of the formulations were found in Duden and our research corpus.

According to the law in force, the letter must be formulated favorably, in order not to make professional advancement difficult for the employee. It must not contain any ambiguous formulations and statements must be formulated in a conclusive, clear and intelligible way. Apart from that, it must be truthful and contain all the important facts needed for a complete assessment from which a future employer could have “*berechtigtes, billigenswertes und schutzwürdiges Interesse*.” “*Für negative Tatsachen und Wertungen trägt der Arbeitgeber im Streitfall die Beweislast*.”

This principle, that the employer must prove the negative statements in case of a dispute, resulted in employers refraining from directly formulated negative assessments in reference letters. The writers of the letters use covert formulations, a kind of a “secret code” instead, because the legislation gives them freedom in choosing words and formulations. Particular formulations are not prescribed, and the assessment scope can be verified by labor courts only to a limited degree. In Germany, approx. 15,000 processes per year dealing with job reference letters are brought before the court. The requirement to avoid issuing a bad reference to an employee led personnel managers develop certain expressions and formulations which indeed sound positive, but secretly have a negative meaning. Typical examples of such coded formulations with exact code explanation available at <http://www.jobworld.de/bewerbungstipps/arbeitszeugnis/> are as follows:

She was diligent and could sell herself well. (= *An unplesasant co-worker without any willingness to cooperate.*)

Sie war tüchtig und wusste sich gut zu verkaufen (= *Eine unangenehme Mitarbeiterin, der es an Kooperationsbereitschaft mangelt*)

He put in his best efforts. (= *He did what he could, but he was not capable of much.*)

Er hat sich im Rahmen seiner Fähigkeiten eingesetzt. (= *Er hat getan was er konnte, er konnte allerdings nicht viel*)

He showed understanding for his work. (= *He did not perform well.*)

Er zeigte Verständnis für seine Arbeit. (= *Er brachte keine Leistung*)



She performed all tasks to her and to the company's interest. (= *She stole company property.*)

Sie hat alle Aufgaben in ihrem und im Firmeninteresse gelöst. (= *Sie hat Firmeneigentum gestohlen*)

She did all the work with much effort and interest. (= *She was eager, but not especially diligent.*)

Sie hat alle Arbeiten mit großem Fleiß und Interesse erledigt. (= *Sie war eifrig, aber nicht besonders tüchtig*)

Her extensive education made her a sought-after conversational partner. (= *She had long private conversations.*)

Ihre umfangreiche Bildung machte sie zu einer gesuchten Gesprächspartnerin. (= *Sie führte lange Privatgespräche*)

His work was precise and he performed his tasks properly. (= *inefficient and bureaucratic*)

Er arbeitete sehr genau und erledigte seine Aufgaben ordnungsgemäß. (= *uneffektiv und bürokratisch*)

He was willing to establish contact. (= *but not able to*)

Er war kontaktbereit. (= *aber nicht kontaktfähig*)

At a first glance, these formulations appear to be positive, and without knowledge of the “reference letter code” the Slovene translator would not interpret them as unfavorable, but rather transfer them readily in a positive manner. There are other forms of negative assessment, such as the order and negation techniques of passive formulations. Short reference letters which contain only basic information are usually seen as negative. For performance evaluations, there is also an established secret code among writers of reference letters. According to Baumann (1988: 94) these are standard formulations which help harmonize verbal statements using a grading scale from 1 to 5.

Grade 1 (very good performance) = *(S)he has met our expectations in every aspect and in a special way or her/his performance has found our special recognition.*

Note 1 (sehr gute Leistungen) = *Sie/er hat unseren Erwartungen in jeder Hinsicht und in besonderer Weise entsprochen oder ihre/seine Leistungen haben unsere besondere Anerkennung gefunden.*

Grade 2 (good performance) = *We were always fully satisfied with her/his work results.*



Note 2 (*gute Leistungen*) = *Mit ihren/seinen Arbeitsergebnissen waren wir stets vollauf zufrieden.*

Grade 3 (satisfactory performance) = *(S)he has fully met our expectations.*

Note 3 (*befriedigende Leistungen*) = *Sie/er hat unseren Erwartungen voll entsprochen.*

Grade 4 (sufficient performance) = *(S)he has met our expectations.*

Note 4 (*ausreichende Leistungen*) = *Sie/er hat unseren Erwartungen entsprochen.*

Grade 5 (inadequate performance) = *(S)he has generally met our expectations.*

Note 5 (*mangelhafte Leistungen*) = *Sie/er hat im Großen und Ganzen unsere Erwartungen erfüllt.*

Translating German and Slovene reference letters thus poses a considerable challenge for the translator. The very fact that in Slovenia a term such the German “Arbeitszeugnis” (literally: work report) is not common, shows that culture-bound translation problems related to certain text types are part of everyday life. In Slovene, the term “Priporočilo” (recommendation) is usually used. A Slovene reference letter, i.e. letter of recommendation, is usually seen as positive when it is short and concise in structure. First, it contains some information about the person, then the description of the sphere of duties and finally, the reason for dismissal. By contrast, a good German reference letter has a complex structure, whereby, alongside general personal information, it contains detailed reports on the specialized knowledge, performance potential and conduct of the person, a practice which could even be seen as discriminatory in Slovenia. When translating reference letters from German into Slovene, the translator is therefore first confronted with the problem of knowing the secret code. Second, the translator has the difficult task of correctly understanding and interpreting the specialized language code. And thirdly, from a below-average German reference letter, one can get a very good and positive Slovene reference letter; alternatively, the translated letter could seem exaggerated and odd because in Slovenia job reference letters must be as short and concise as possible.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, we can conclude that the skopos theory, which applies to the activity of translation, has contributed considerably to the *dethronement of the holy original*,



because the information is transferred beyond linguistic elements and translation is seen as cultural transfer. The analysis of reference letter based on the skopos theory revealed that a consistent enforcement of the postulates of this theory can improve the quality and consistency of the translata. When translating Slovene and German reference letters, which can be understood as culture-bound specialized texts, there are certain culturally-specific conventions which can be problematic for the translator if he/she does not implement the principle of translation as cultural transfer in the translation process. If one does not take into consideration the differences between the source and target texts, this can lead to the failure of transcultural transfer. If the translator is unaware of the meaning, function and structure of the reference letters in both cultures, her/his translation is not appropriate. The translator may then harm client's interests and even make an employment impossible.

Culture-bound differences must not be underestimated in a translation and the translator has to be aware of culturally-specific differences and how to deal with them, i.e. he/she must be able to develop adequate solution strategies. Here, translational competency of translators as transcultural mediators and individually acting persons plays a key role. The notions such as transcultural communication, culture, targeted translation action are to be seen as important parts and frameworks of the translation process, whereby cultural restriction of a language is seen as an important element of linguistic awareness.

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PREVOĐENJE PREPORUKA (ZA ZAPOSŁJAVANJE) S ASPEKTA TEORIJE SKOPOSA

Pojam kulturne različitosti međunarodnih dokumenata koji se koriste prilikom zapošljavanja sve je naglašeniji. U razdoblju slobodnog tržišta, konkurencije na svjetskoj razini i globalnog tržišta rada, prevoditelj nema više samo ulogu jezičnog posrednika, već postaje i stručnjak za komunikaciju. Prevođenje je definirano kao interakcija komunikacijske strategije, koja je određena svojom svrhom, skoposom. Na primjeru njemačkih i slovenskih pisama preporuke za zapošljavanje analizirat će se princip društveno-kulturnog položaja izvornih tekstova i njihovih prijevoda, uzimajući istovremeno u obzir povijesni i pravni kontekst. Pojmovi poput međunarodne, u ovom slučaju slovensko-njemačke kulture prijava za zapošljavanje, te usko povezanih kulturnih načela kompozicije teksta, istaknuti su kao prioritet ovog članka o holističko-translatološkom proučavanju dokumenata korištenih za zapošljavanje, a koji se temelji na empiričkoj analizi 27 prevedenih njemačkih i slovenskih preporuka za zapošljavanje. Navedeni prijevodi se uvelike razlikuju – ne samo po svojoj strukturi, već i prema položaju u pravnom sustavu u navedenim državama, te po značaju koji im se pridaje u procesu zapošljavanja. Za pozitivnu ocjenu poslodavca u Njemačkoj, pismo preporuke mora biti prilično detaljno, dok se kratka pisma preporuke smatraju relativno negativnima. U Sloveniji pak, pisma preporuke moraju biti što kraća i konciznija.

Ključne riječi: prevođenje; teorija skoposa; preporuke; komunikacija; poznavanje kulture.